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SUBJECT: Iraqi Kurdistan Region Media Summary --
March 11, 2007

11. (U) This is a Regional Reconstruction Team (RRT) cable.

KRG Publishes Draft Federal Oil and Gas Law in English and Arabic

12. (U) The Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) spokesman published an authorized English translation of the draft Federal Oil and Gas Law of Iraq today. The original Arabic draft, also published by the KRG today, was approved by the Oil and Energy Committee of the Iraq Council of Ministers. The English translation published today was prepared and authorized by the KRG. "These are the drafts which are recognized by the KRG," said KRG Natural Resources Minister Dr. Ashti Hawrami in a statement. "Old and inaccurate translations of this vital draft law have been circulating in the media in recent weeks. By publishing the original Arabic and the authoritative English translation together, we hope to make the picture clearer for potential investors in Iraq." Dr. Hawrami represents the KRG on the Oil and Energy Committee.

Female Parliamentarians Propose Changes to KRG Personal Status Law

13. (U) Newspapers reported that Women's Rights Protection Committee of the Kurdistan National Assembly is preparing to submit a proposed Bill of Rights that would make a number of changes to the KRG personal status code aimed at increased gender equality in the Kurdistan Region. According to the committee, the proposed amendments are based on international agreements and Kurdish community standards and will maintain compliance with Islamic law.

Byblos Bank plans Iraq expansion from Kurdish North

14. (U) Major newspapers wrote that Byblos Bank, Lebanon's third-largest lender, will open a branch in Iraq next month using the safety of the Kurdish north as a platform for expansion into a country that holds 10% of the world's oil reserves. "Iraq is very important, there is huge potential there," said Chairman Francois Bassil in an interview from his office in Beirut on March 6. Byblos will open its branch in Erbil because the city is more secure than other parts of the country, he said.

Shahid Khalid Hospital Opens in Koya

15. (U) Newspapers reported on the opening of the Shahid Khalid hospital in Koya. After 4 years of renovation the hospital now has 8 labs, 2 large operation rooms, and an intensive care unit. The hospital was opened in a ceremony led by the KRG Minister of Health who said that his ministry will try to send some of the hospital's doctors and staff abroad for training.

Commentaries:

¶6. (U) A. M. Pers writes in a column in the KDP's Khabat Newspaper that although he is optimistic Kirkuk will come back to the Kurdistan region, he is disappointed the KRG is not doing more to ensure the result. He says that Kurds are asking for their rights bashfully and ends his column by asking the question, "Has the Kurdish spell been dissolved after the death of Mustafa Barzani?"

¶7. (U) In an article in the PUK-run Kurdistan Nwe, Rezhein Kurd writes about the use of headscarves by women in Kurdish society. Rezhein thinks religion should not be the motivator for wearing headscarves, but rather represents a cultural phenomenon.

¶8. (U) This media summary is prepared by Public Diplomacy Assistant Hama Othman.